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LONGFELLOW AND WESTMINSTER ABBEY.

BY HENRY J. VERNON.



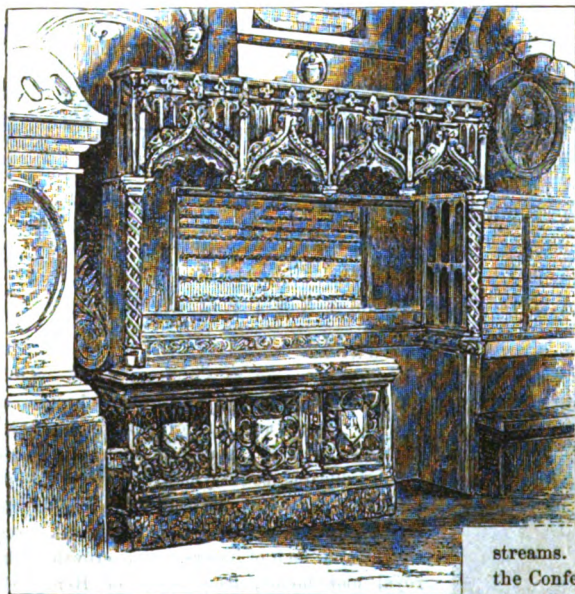
LONGFELLOW'S BUST.

THE placing a bust of Longfellow in Westminster Abbey is a graceful tribute, on the part of the authorities of that venerable edifice, to the common blood which unites America and England, and to the common laws and literature shared alike by both. It was the late Charles Kingsley, we believe, who first suggested that the historic Abbey, the Campo Santo of Great Britain, should be opened, in future, to the mighty dead of the United States as well as to those of the mother-country. As a result of this, the bust of Longfellow now stands in what is called the Poets' Corner, close to the tomb of Chaucer, "the father of English poetry."

We suppose no American, at all read in the annals of England, goes to London without paying a visit, almost the very first day, to Westminster Abbey. For the Abbey combines, in a greater degree than any other edifice of the kind, the

architectural beauty, the historical interest, and the heroic and poetic associations, which appeal so strongly, though in different degrees, to our educated countrymen. It has been, for centuries, the receptacle of the illustrious dead: of kings, queens, warriors, statesmen, great churchmen, men of letters. It is crowded with royal monuments, from those of Henry the Third and Queen Eleanor of Castile, to those of Queen Elizabeth and her great rival, Mary Stuart. There repose Chatham and Burke, Sir Cloudesley Shovel and Admiral Warren, Mansfield and Canning, Wolfe and Clyde, Pitt and Fox. But the monuments erected to these great men have but little attraction for an American, compared with those which he finds in Poets' Corner; for there lie, or are represented by busts, men whose names are household-words on two continents; whose books are ever in our hands, or in those of our children; and whose fame is as much that of the men of America, as it is that of the men of London or Edinburgh, because the language and literature which they represent belong to both in common.

Prominent before all the rest is the monument to Chaucer, erected A. D. 1551, showing, as Dean Stanley has said, how freshly the fame of "the father of English poetry" still flourished, a century and a half after his death. As he was the first of English poets, and the first to be represented in the Abbey, it was eminently fit that the bust of Longfellow, the first American poet to have a niche there, should be placed near his monument, as it has been. There, too, are the busts of Spenser, Shakespeare, Ben Jonson, Milton, Dryden, Addison, Garrick, Goldsmith, Macaulay, Dickens, Thackeray, and others of that "innumerable army" of the mighty dead. A "dim religious light," filtering through the stained-glass windows, hangs ever about the southern transept, in which the Poets' Corner is situated; and when the dusk draws on, and the



CHAUCER'S TOMB: WESTMINSTER ABBEY.

twilight grows indistinct, one almost fancies the busts begin to breathe, and that the gloom becomes alive with ghosts.

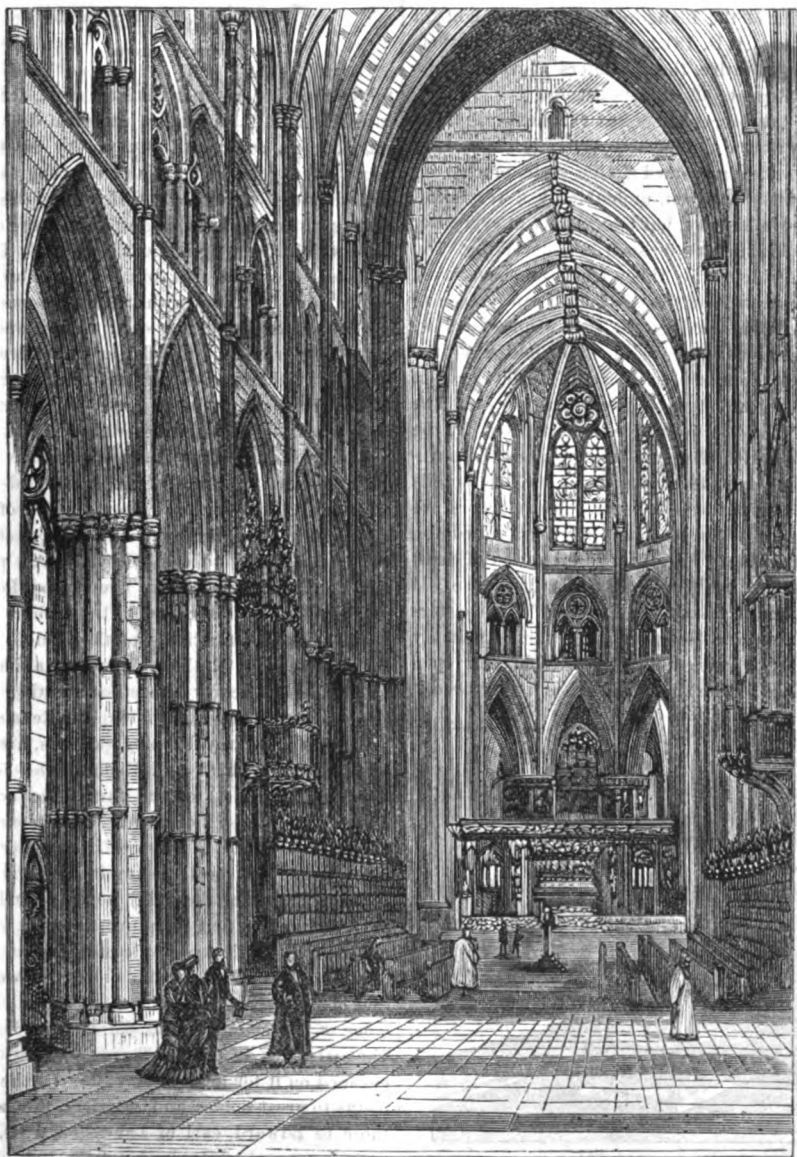
We have said that the Abbey is interesting for its architectural beauty. It is one of the best specimens of the best style of the Middle Ages. Originally open fields extended from it to the gates of London. Now a continuous line of buildings reaches the whole way to Temple Bar, a distance of more than two miles; and the roar of traffic is heard where, even as late as the reign of Henry the Eighth, the marsh-grass grew and the startled heron rose clanging from the reeds. There is some doubt as to when a church was first erected at Westminster. But the most authentic account fixes it at A. D. 616, in the reign of Sebert, king of the East Saxons. The original edifice was the work of a colony of monks, who dedicated it to St. Peter, and built an abbey-house close by. A legendary statement, probably the growth of the credulous earlier Middle Ages, says that the edifice was consecrated by the saint in person: for that, on a dark and stormy night, a stranger, on the opposite shore of the Thames, called to a belated fisherman to ferry him over; that the fisherman obeyed; that suddenly the church, then just completed, began to blaze with transcendent light; and that the stranger, now revealed as St. Peter, proceeded to consecrate the building, while fragrant odors spread all around, and a chorus of celestial voices was heard, angels being seen ascending and descending as in Jacob's vision.

The isolated condition of the spot was a principal reason why the monks selected it for their church and abbey. Surrounded by nearly impassable marshes, thick-set with thorns—whence its original name of Thorney Island—it was comparatively secure from attack: and the days had not yet ceased when the still heathen Danes, in their long, narrow, clinker-built ships, came sailing up the Thames, sparing, in their ruthless cruelty, neither age nor sex, neither layman nor priest. But, as the generations came and went, and society began to be settled, the necessity for this isolation, as a means of self-defense, passed away; and the marshes were gradually filled up: partly by artificial means, partly by the natural silt of the

streams. Long before this, however, Edward the Confessor, attracted by the quiet and seclusion of the spot, decided to build a palace near the abbey-house of the monks, and erect, close by, a larger and better church for them, making it also a royal chapel. This was the beginning of what is now Westminster Abbey: called the West Minster to distinguish it from St. Paul's, which was east of it, and therefore the East Minster.

The Confessor's edifice was one of the most stately of its day. From the rude picture of it still to be seen on the Bayeux tapestry, it appears to have had a central tower, a nave, choir, and transepts, and to have followed the Norman style—such as we still see it, unimpaired, at Durham, Peterborough, and Norwich. But only a few foundation stones of it now remain. The existing abbey-church is principally the work of Henry the Third and his son Edward the First, and resembles, in its lofty nave, and other respects, a French or Spanish, rather than an English cathedral. The late Dean Stanley told the writer of this article that he believed the Abbey to have been erected by Spanish architects, brought over to England by Eleanor of Castile, the wife of Edward the First. Certainly, a study of the great Spanish churches—either in person or from the engravings in Mr. Street's well-known volume—favors this idea. As certainly, Westminster Abbey, though wanting in that beauty of surroundings which is derived from being embowered in trees, as Salisbury and others are, has such a grace of outline, such an airy lightness, that it actually seems, to soar, the stones themselves appearing to have caught fervor from their destination, and aspiring to heaven.

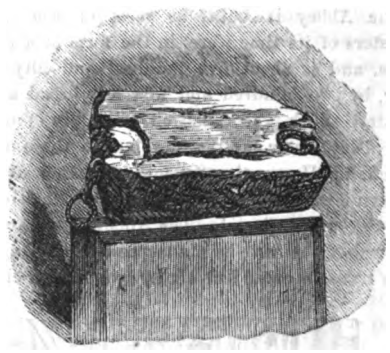
The Abbey is built, as most of the great minsters of its time were, in the form of a Latin cross, and is about five hundred and fifty feet long, by two hundred and fifty feet broad at its greatest width. It consisted originally of nave, side-aisles, choir, and apse; but to these were added, by Henry the Seventh, a chapel, at the eastern extremity, called, after himself, Henry the Seventh's Chapel. The Abbey is crossed at the end of the nave by transepts at right angles, each transept extending eighty-two feet on either side beyond the nave and aisles. The nave is one hundred and seven feet high. We state these figures in order that those of our readers who have never visited Europe may have some idea of the vast scale on which these medieval cathedrals were built. The view of the nave which we give, looking east, with the light coming down at the intersection of the transepts, shows the extent of the minster. Henry the Seventh's Chapel beyond is one hundred and four feet long, by seventy feet wide. It is not seen, in this en-



NAVE OF WESTMINSTER ABBEY: LOOKING EAST.

graving, but is entered through the pointed arches at the end of the vista, and is a splendid specimen of the florid Perpendicular style. Like the rest of the Abbey, this gorgeous chapel is built of stone, with a stone roof. Yet, viewed from the outside, it seems all windows, the roof being supported principally by flying buttresses. Inside, with its lofty stained-glass casements, and its fan-tracery roof overhead, it presents a picture of architectural boldness, yet of airy lightness and of beauty, that absolutely dazzles the spectator. We give an engraving of this chapel, taken from a rare print of the inauguration of the Knights of Bath *there*, A. D. 1812, with the knights in their picturesque attire, their banners above, and the Prince Regent, afterwards George the Fourth, leading the procession. See the next page.

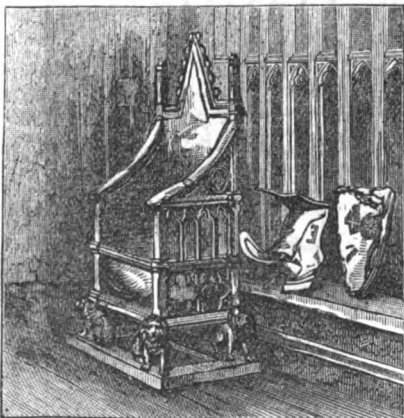
The western end of the Abbey is defaced by two towers, in a bastard Gothic style, erected by Sir Christopher Wren, undoubtedly a very great architect in his way, but too entirely in sympathy with the Italian style for such an undertaking. The northern side of the Abbey fronts an open paved space, from which its entire length can be seen to the greatest advantage: the aisle-windows below, the clerestory ones above, the flying buttresses, the pinnacles, the soaring roof over all. The façade of the north transept, here, is especially noble. The view of the southern side is obstructed by the cloisters, which there are built up along the nave-aisles, and by the chapter-house, which stands close to the southern transept. The cloisters are in the best style of what has been called the Pointed Gothic. We give an illustration of them three pages further on. It was here the old monks used to take their exercise. The cloisters extend around a hollow square, which originally was a sort of garden, and into which their open arches look. The chapter-house is a very beauti-



STONE OF SCONE.

ful specimen of a somewhat later style, the Decorated Gothic. It had fallen into great decay, and was almost a ruin, until restored by Sir Gilbert Scott, a few years ago. We give an engraving of the chapter-house also. Notice how the stone roof is supported by a single pillar in the centre, from which arms stretch out, overhead, like the branches of a palm-tree, to meet the sides of the edifice, and sustain, with them, the enormous incumbent weight of the stone ceiling and roof. In the illustration of the cloisters, the view looks south, with the door leading into the chapter-house on the right, and the open green—or court-yard, so to speak—of the cloisters on the left.

We alluded to the royal and other tombs in the Abbey, when speaking of the busts and monuments in Poets' Corner. They are full of vivid historical interest, for here lie the heroes of every "foughten field," to use old Froissart's phrase, that England has had, from Cressy and Poitiers to Blenheim and Quebec. The earlier monuments—those distinctively of the Middle Age—are, strange to say, the best. They have a simplicity and nobleness nearly altogether wanting in the allegorical ones that came in with the Renaissance. The two noblest royal tombs, perhaps, are those of Henry the Third and Richard the Second: they are valuable, too, as furnishing accurate likenesses of those monarchs. Both monuments are in bronze, and the former is considered the first specimen of metal-casting in England: they altogether refute the still popular and once universal notion, that sculpture, as an art, did not exist in the Middle Ages, at least in England. The most beautiful of all the monuments, however, is that of Henry the Seventh. Lord Bacon called it "one of the stateliest and daintiest in Europe." The artist was an Italian, Torregiano, and he was engaged on it for nearly six years. Of the monuments to great nobles and warriors, the best are those to Edward, earl of Lancaster, A. D. 1278; to Aylmer, earl of Pembroke, A. D. 1323; and to

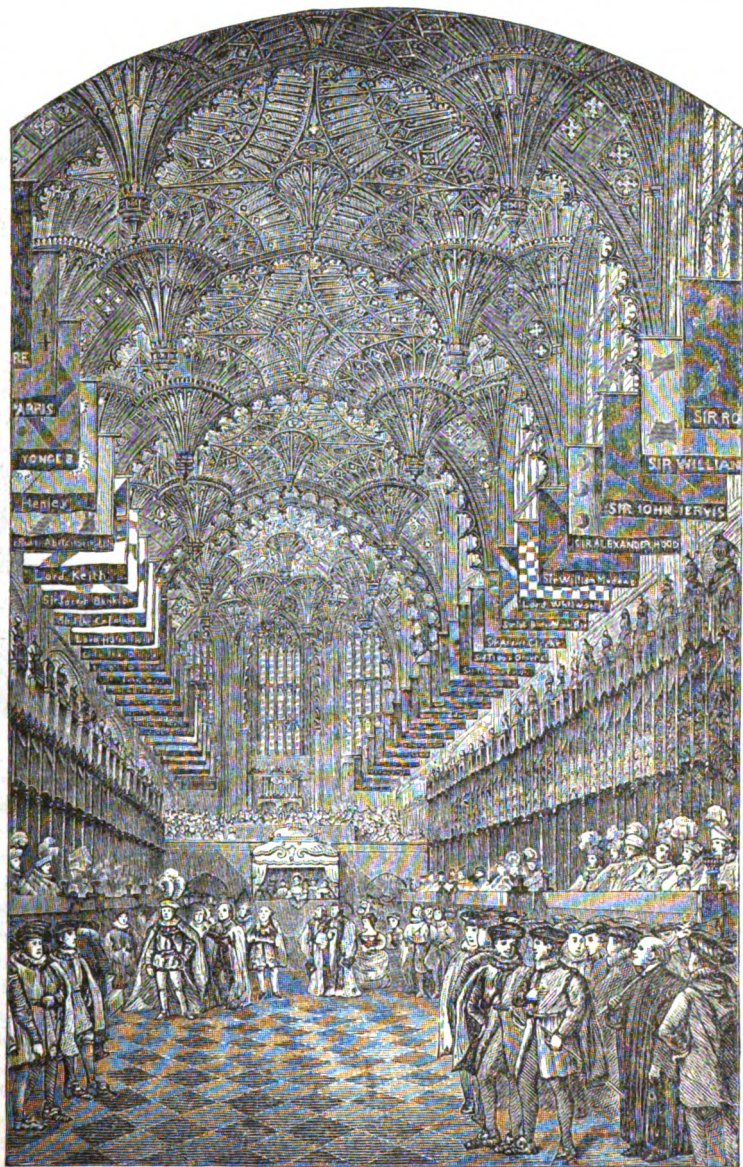


CORONATION CHAIR.

Sir Francis Vere, A. D. 1606. This last, like the other two, is Gothic in feeling, though the Renaissance had set in nearly a century before. It represents the recumbent figure of the dead hero, with four knights kneeling at the corners, and supporting a sort of vast shield, on which lie his gauntlets, his helmet, and his other personal arms. It is of this monument that Roubillac, the sculptor, said, when first seeing it, as he looked at one of the knights: "Hush! he will speak presently."

Perhaps, however, the most interesting object in the Abbey, historically, is the Coronation Chair and the famous Stone of Scone, which it encloses. On the preceding page, we give an engraving of this chair, with the stone seen under the seat; and also on the same page, an engraving of the stone itself, separately. This extraordinary stone was brought to London by Edward the First, from Scotland, as one of the spoils of his campaign, after the defeat of the Scotch. It had been used in Scotland for centuries, as a throne, on which to crown the Scottish kings. Legend carried its antiquity back, indeed, to the patriarchal age, and asserted it to have been the stone on which Jacob slept at Bethel. But as it is of sandstone, and of the sandstone found on the west coast of Scotland, it is probably not older, in its

present shape, than the sixth century, when it may have formed, to give it the greatest possible antiquity, part of the primitive cathedral at St. Iona. Dean Stanley thought there was reason to believe it could be traced to St. Columba, and that it was the pillow on which he slept, and on which "his dying head was laid." It was afterwards used, as we have said, for a seat on which to crown the Scottish kings. Edward the First, after his invasion, carried it off to London, affirming that, as the rightful heir to the Scottish



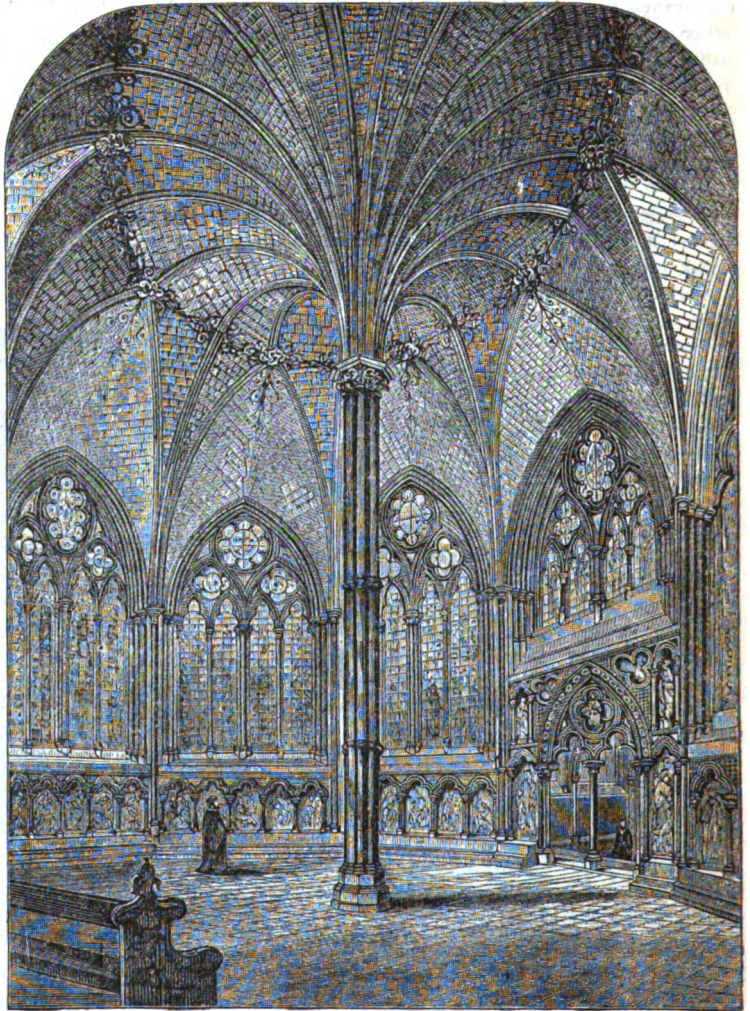
HENRY THE SEVENTH'S CHAPEL: INSTALLATION OF KNIGHTS OF BATH.

throne, he was entitled to its custody. Curious to say, there was, as early as the fourteenth century, a prevailing popular prediction that the true kings of Scotland would have their revenge in time, by becoming kings of England, a prophecy which was fulfilled in the beginning of the seventeenth century, when James the Sixth of Scotland became James the First of England. Edward the First had a wooden chair constructed, in which to enclose this stone; and this chair is the one still seen in the Abbey, and represented in our cut. Every subsequent monarch of England, down to Queen Victoria, has been crowned in this chair.

Americans generally—and especially all American ladies—are most interested, next

after the Coronation Chair and Stone, in the tomb of Queen Elizabeth, and that of her great rival—Mary, Queen of Scots. Of the two, that of the latter is artistically the best. It is the one, also, that is first inquired after, so universal is the law that makes us forget and forgive everything to misfortune. Whatever historical critics may say of Mary, Queen of Scots, her death on the scaffold, even without the traditions of her beauty, her graces, and her magnetism of character, will always keep her a popular idol.

Another object of interest, merely antiquarian to some, but religious to others, is the shrine of Edward the Confessor. This was much injured at the time of the Reformation, and remained so for a considerable period; but it has now been

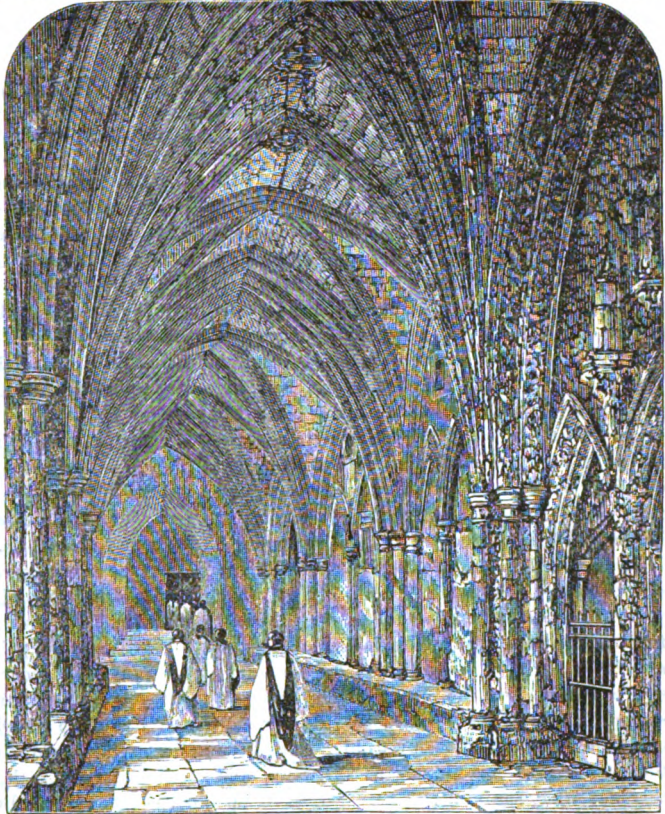


THE CHAPTER-HOUSE.

restored, and is a conspicuous object in the Abbey. It is curious from an antiquarian point, as showing what good work was done, in an age that formerly was considered barbarous even in art. The present generation has also seen it regain something of its old position, as a resort for pilgrims; for, of recent years, on the Confessor's Day, numerous Roman Catholic devotees have come to kneel at it; and the dignitaries of the Abbey, though differing in faith from these pilgrims, have, with large-minded toleration, not interfered with their visits. It was with Dean Stanley that the wide charity originated which is seen in this and in other things connected with the Abbey; and as long as even the tradition of his time remains, the same broad feeling will

probably prevail. The suggestion to place the bust of an American poet in the Abbey, fifty years ago, perhaps even twenty, would have been met almost angrily, at that period, by a refusal, from the custodians of the great minster.

The bust of Longfellow is on the east side of the southern transept, a little to the north of Chaucer's tomb, and between that and the bust of Dryden. In the engraving which is given in the front of the number, of "Poets' Corner," the tomb of Chaucer may be readily distinguished. It is seen on the left, just in front of the more northerly window on the eastern side of the transept. Longfellow's bust has been placed still further to the left, on the corner-shaft of clustered columns which divides the transept from the aisle, and directly under the shield-like cenotaph which is seen there, and which was erected to the memory of Martha Birch, A. D. 1703. The



THE CLOISTERS.



EXACT POSITION OF LONGFELLOW'S BUST.

large engraving having been drawn for us before Longfellow's bust had been put up, the bust does not appear. But we give here a smaller engraving, made since, representing the exact locality. The bust of Dryden is on the left, but out of sight in both views. The railing is omitted in the small cut.

At the beginning of this article, we give an engraving of the bust, sufficiently large to afford a good idea of the likeness, which is considered unusually excellent. The sculptor was Mr. Thomas Brock. The bust was unveiled on the first of March of this year, in the presence of a brilliant assemblage: Longfellow's daughters being there; and the poet Lowell, our representative at London, making one of his most felicitous speeches on the occasion. The bust bears the following inscription, prepared by Dean Stanley before his death:

THIS BUST WAS PLACED
AMONG THE MEMORIALS OF
THE POETS OF ENGLAND
BY ENGLISH ADMIRERS OF
AN AMERICAN POET.